



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 3 of 13)



Role:	Chief of Language Services
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	8 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Lisa P. Nathan
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Justine Ndongo-Keller describes various roles within the Language Services Department at the ICTR, clarifying differences among interpreters, translators and reviewers. She stresses the importance of effective, high-quality translation for the Tribunal's overall success, as well as the significance of review in the translation process. An original member of the language services team, Ndongo-Keller also provides a perspective on the department's evolution. She comments on the personal toll to individuals in language services from extensive exposure to materials about the genocide.

The transcript of Part 3 begins on the following page.

Part 3

- 00:00** Donald J Horowitz: Let me go back to 1994 for a minute. That's when these events occurred . . .
- 00:06 Yes.
- 00:07** DJH: . . . the, and the ones in Rwanda, the events. Can you remember what you were doing at that time?
- 00:14 I was home. I was home in Cameroon. I was working at the National Assembly then. I was the Chief Interpreter at the Cameroon National Assembly and we all saw it on television, you know, the killings on television. I have to say that at that time I did not quite understand what was happening. We just saw this killing.
- 00:36 I remember that there were prayer sessions in the, in churches in Cameroon. You know, they were saying on, at the, on the radio, "You have to pray for Rwanda," you know. "Killings are happening or occurring there. People are killing others." I did not quite understand what was happening until a Cameroonian was appointed to go to the (_____).
- 01:04 At that time it was the United Nation Mission for Rwanda, Peacekeeping Mission for Rwanda by the name of Booh Jacques. He had been our Ambassador in Paris and then Minister of Foreign Affairs in Cameroon 'til he was appointed there as a special envoy for the UN along with General, General Dallaire, the Canadian who was to, to, to head the, the, the mission military-wise.
- 01:37 That's how, you know, we really became interested and knew that there was a conflict between a group called Hutu, another group called the Tutsi. Then we received a lot of refugees coming from Rwanda but in Cameroon we never knew who was what – who was Hutu, who was Tutsi. We didn't know. We just knew that there was a war going on in Rwanda and people were fleeing Rwanda, running, leaving Rwanda and going to neighboring countries.
- 02:06 We received quite a lot of them in Cameroon.
- 02:09** DJH: And did you meet any of them or talk to any of them at that time?
- 02:14 Not really.
- 02:15** DJH: Okay.
- 02:15 Not really.
- 02:17** DJH: So when you were asked to join the ICTR a few years later, were you surprised or what did you think?

- 02:29 I was surprised when I received the offer.
- 02:32 DJH: And what did you (___)?**
- 02:33 Then also I was thrilled, you know, to, to be, to come and work with the UN but a bit worried because of what I had seen on television and my entourage was saying, "But you're crazy. Did you see what was happening there? How could you, how can you decide to . . . ?" Especially my husband.
- 02:51 He was like, "You're not going there because, you know, all the killing, what we saw on television." And I'm like, "But you know people live there. After, let me go for two weeks then I will see. If it's not what it should be then I will come back." So that basically what we had agreed on, but I stayed (___) and I'm here today.
- 03:12 DJH: All right, and when you went there apparently you felt safe enough, yes or no?**
- 03:18 It was safe, but you know there was – you know, you, you feel safe because you know you're guarded, but in the background you have all these things that have happened and are still happening in town. You hear about killing here and there. You know that people have been killed. People have been attacked but you feel safe because you know that you have your radio and you can call anybody at any time and they will come and pick you up.
- 03:43 Because you're from the UN, you have this "security" quote unquote, more or less around you but there is something in the air that make you not to feel that safe. But it is – and even today, whenever I go to Kigali I still feel there's something. I don't feel too comfortable. I can't put a finger on it. I can't put a name on it but it's, it's in the air.
- 04:10 DJH: But you, but you decided to stay nevertheless.**
- 04:13 I decided to stay because I liked what I was doing and I was comfortable, and it was difficult at that time but some people had to stay behind to do the job so I guess most people stayed because they like the place, because they like the job or they like the money as well because it was, it's well paid. We have to acknowledge.
- 04:37 DJH: Okay.**